

Los Angeles County  
Children's Planning Council  
*Improving Children's Lives*

**ADOPTED**  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

**116**

**JUN 04 2002**

*Violet Varona-Lukens*  
VIOLET VARONA-LUKENS  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

June 4, 2002

Honorable Board of Supervisors  
County of Los Angeles  
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**REQUEST TO ADOPT THE CHILDREN'S PLANNING COUNCIL'S  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTING THE  
NEWBORN ABANDONMENT LAW (SB 1368)  
(3 Votes)**

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE BOARD:**

1. Adopt the 12 recommendations described in Attachment A of this report for more effectively implementing the Newborn Abandonment Law (SB 1368).
2. Instruct the Chief Administrative Office—in partnership with the Children's Planning Council, the Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, and County departments—to identify public and private funding opportunities for each of the Safe Haven recommendations that require additional funding, and report back to the Board within 60 days of the receipt of the implementation plan for each of these recommendations.

**PURPOSE/JUSTIFICATION OF RECOMMENDED ACTION**

On February 5, 2002, the Board requested that the Children's Planning Council (CPC) convene a task force to develop a report with recommendations for more effectively implementing the Newborn Abandonment Law (SB 1368), often referred to as the "Safe Haven Law." The Board encouraged the task force to use a prevention-oriented focus that could achieve the goal of no babies ever being abandoned in Los Angeles County.

On March 5, the Board requested that the CPC include in its report a synthesis and analysis of what is known about women who have discarded their newborns, and a list

of relevant existing programs that could provide services and supports to these women and their families. You also requested that the CPC explore other states' safe-haven laws and determine their applicability to the Los Angeles County effort.

On April 30, the Board asked that the task force explore the appropriateness of implementing the Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center's "Safe Surrender" model at County hospitals and fire stations; and that the Director of Health Services evaluate and report back to the Board within 30 days on the feasibility, costs, and steps necessary to implement the "Safe Surrender" model at County hospitals. Members of the task force will review the report when it is finalized and submit recommendations in a separate report to the Board by June 11.

The Board's interest in a prevention-oriented approach toward the implementation of the Safe Haven Law presents an extraordinary opportunity to encourage outreach and support for any woman who may be experiencing a crisis related to her pregnancy. It can also help to engage the community at large in responding to the needs of these women and their families.

#### Safe Haven Task Force

On March 6, 2002, the CPC convened the Safe Haven Task Force. A Resource Group joined with the Task Force to provide input and support. Attachment B shows the composition of these two groups. The Task Force was also informed by the March 2002 "Data on Abandoned Newborns: Los Angeles County, 1999–2001," which was prepared by the Department of Health Services for the Task Force in response to the Board's March 5 request. Attachment C is a copy of that report. Two experts in the field of pregnancy and childbirth presented the Task Force with research findings related to both the physical and psychosocial aspects of the childbearing experience, and Task Force members shared powerful stories of their own experiences with parents who had abandoned or safely surrendered their babies. The Task Force also reviewed a summary of other states' safe-haven laws.

#### What Did We Learn From the Data About Abandoned Babies?

An extensive review of relevant national surveys, international studies, existing data on babies abandoned in Los Angeles County in 2001, and local data on women considered "at risk" for abandoning their infants revealed the following about abandoned babies:

- The data reflects only those babies who were discovered (14 were reported in Los Angeles County in 2001), leaving the actual number of discarded infants unknown; the limited data and unique circumstances of these abandonments preclude estimating the actual number of babies abandoned annually in this county.

- Contrary to national data that shows a strong association between substance abuse and infant abandonment, few of the Los Angeles cases reviewed revealed such a connection.
- There is no clear, discernible set of demographics for mothers at risk; they represent all reproductive ages, all racial/ethnic groups, and various economic situations.
- However, there are some consistent situational characteristics among mothers who have abandoned their babies, including that they are:
  - Likely to be denying or concealing their pregnancies
  - Likely to lack a support system (familial, social, and/or community)
  - Unlikely to seek prenatal care

#### What Are the Implications of the Data?

Based on the data, findings from academic research, and their own expertise, Task Force members determined that there are no simple solutions to the problem of newborn abandonment. The Task Force recognized the need for a multi-faceted, long-term systemic effort that would target *all* women of childbearing age, with special attention given to pregnant women who are clinically depressed or in abusive relationships, have a history of abuse and neglect, live in financial deprivation, and/or do not seek or maintain regular prenatal care. This approach needs to overcome the challenge of reaching women who are in denial about or concealing their pregnancies and who may be socially isolated. For this effort to succeed, it will need to include outreach to the families and communities in which these women live.

This effort, as outlined in the Task Force recommendations, seeks to involve families, community, and County and community service and support program providers and policy-makers, with a focus on four priorities:

1. Strengthening the preventive aspects of the Safe Haven Law by advocating for legislative changes informed, in part, by other states' efforts to implement safe-haven laws
2. Expanding the range of Safe Haven Sites
3. Enhancing services to women of childbearing age and their families by educating providers about the dynamics of newborn abandonment and about the Safe Haven Law
4. Designing and implementing a widespread public information campaign in partnership with the State's efforts

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

These recommendations contribute to the achievement of County Strategic Plan Goal 5: Children and Families' Well-Being.

### **FISCAL IMPACT/FINANCING**

The implementation of some elements of these recommendations will result in incremental costs to the County, while others will have start-up, implementation, and/or maintenance costs associated with them. The departments identified as responsible for implementing the recommendations will include cost analyses in the implementation plans they are being asked to submit to the Board.

To minimize costs, Task Force members envisioned leveraging resources through partnerships that would include the State, counties adjoining Los Angeles, community-based organizations, and the Los Angeles County Children and Families First—Proposition 10 Commission. They have also identified linkages with existing County efforts, such as using the soon-to-be-operational Countywide Web Portal to provide information regarding prevention and intervention services to women and families at risk for abandoning their babies.

The Chief Administrative Office, in consultation with the Children's Planning Council, is exploring alternative funding sources to help mitigate the fiscal impact to the County and our community-based partners. Outside funding sources could include grants from such organizations as the Proposition 10 Commission, the California Department of Social Services, private philanthropic organizations, and child-oriented corporations such as Gerber Baby Foods, McDonald's Foods, Mattel Toys, etc.

### **FACTS AND PROVISIONS/LEGAL REQUIREMENTS**

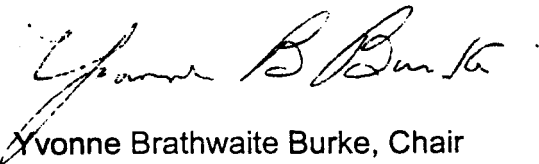
None.

### **IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES**

The Task Force has determined that these recommendations can be integrated with and enhance current service delivery practices at County and community sites—especially as they relate to the education of staff and the families they serve about the Safe Haven Law, and where and how to safely surrender a baby. By recognizing the need to support women who are in crisis regarding their pregnancies, and by mobilizing community involvement through improved public awareness of the Safe Haven Law, the concerted effort proposed by the Task Force provides a strong basis for achieving the Board's goal that no babies are discarded or abandoned.

The Children's Planning Council expresses its appreciation to the Board for the opportunity to convene on its behalf the work group that developed this report and recommendations. We also want to recognize all the members of the Task Force and the Resource Group for their dedication and commitment. We believe that this process of bringing government and community together to solve problems is exactly the type of coordinated effort that will help to improve the well-being of children and families in Los Angeles County.

Respectfully submitted,



Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Chair  
Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council

Attachments (3)

cc: Chief Administrative Office  
Chief Information Office  
County Counsel  
Department of Children and Family Services  
Department of Health Services  
Department of Human Resources  
Department of Mental Health  
District Attorney  
Fire Department  
Internal Services Department  
Sheriff's Department  
Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect